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Institutional Breton language policy after language shift

Abstract: The last twenty years have seen a remarkable change in public and institutional support for Breton language promotion. Language activists who had previously resisted and opposed the actions of the French state are now to the fore in designing and implementing institutional language policies to promote Breton, particularly in schooling, adult learning, media, arts and the public space. Spolsky (2003) usefully distinguishes between policies aimed at “revitalization” in home language acquisition and usage (notably in educational policy) and “regeneration” in activities in wider society. This paper concentrates on the regeneration efforts exemplified by the *Ya d’ar Brezhoneg* program for local language plans, drawing on qualitative interview data from Breton language professionals and employees of *Ofis ar Brezhoneg*, the Region’s Breton language promotion agency.

Keywords: language plans; regional language policy; revitalization and regeneration; Breton.

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1 Introduction

Brittany’s Regional Council adopted a document entitled *Une Politique Linguistique pour la Bretagne* (‘A language policy for Brittany’) on 17 December 2004. It defined broad aims to support and develop Breton and Gallo and set the agenda for officializing language policy. The political majority in the Regional Council was a socialist-led alliance that was re-elected in 2010, including new figures from the Breton language movement in its ranks, but the policy was accepted by unanimous vote in full session. Ways to productively implement language policy in favor of Breton, rather than any opposition to it, were among the themes of the political campaigns for the March 2010 regional elections (Broudic 2010a). This consensus among elected politicians reflects wide support among the general population for the language promotion project. That support, however ill-defined, represents a sharp turnaround in both openly expressed and implicit public opinion in the last fifteen to twenty years, not least among Breton speakers

themselves. A much more detailed policy proposal is currently being prepared 1
and due to be introduced in 2012, once it has been adopted by the regional assem- 2
bly. Whereas policy for protecting and promoting the Breton language depended 3
for many years on voluntarist action led by committed language activists who 4
were in opposition to the linguistic and cultural policies of the state, leadership 5
in language policy is on the cusp of becoming institutionalized, where actions 6
in favor of Breton become increasingly implemented by various levels of govern- 7
ment and regional agencies. This current state of Breton language policy, which 8
Lesk (2011) describes as neo-institutionalist, represents a hybrid of voluntarism 9
and institutional intervention based on education provision and modelling of lin- 10
guistic service provision. 11

Researchers in the 1990s and earlier (for example, McDonald [1989] and Jones 12
[1998]) found native speakers to be ambivalent about, or even hostile to promoting 13
Breton and unsympathetic to revivalists. This ambivalence of older, traditional 14
speakers is evident in their non-transmission of the language to younger genera- 15
tions. Breton was still a majority language in western Brittany in the first half of 16
the 20th century but went into rapid decline after the end of World War II due to 17
a break in inter-generational transmission, which has been well attested in the 18
sociolinguistic literature. The dynamic has continued to the present, as Broudic 19
(2009: 71–76) demonstrates that even the decline in speaker numbers from 1997 20
to 2007 can be explained by cohort depletion due to deaths, meaning that only 21
small numbers of children have learned the language at home from their parents. 22
The reasons that parents did not speak Breton to their children are complex, as 23
in all language shift situations. In part they may be explained by their desire to 24
encourage their children to speak French well rather than because of any antago- 25
nism towards Breton, parents having little awareness of the benefits, or even pos- 26
sibility of bringing their children up bilingually in the absence of role models and 27
educational discourse promoting it. To some extent, it might also be attributed 28
to speakers internalizing the national authorities' historical discursive construc- 29
tion of Breton as being of the pre-modern rural past and as an impediment to 30
personal improvement and socio-economic progress, a phenomenon common to 31
many cases of linguistic minoritization in Europe, identified clearly in the Euro- 32
mosaic studies carried out in 1992–1993 (Nelde et al. 1996; Williams 2005), 2004 33
and 2009 (European Commission 2010), which included research among fluent 34
Breton speakers (Euromosaic 1999). The deeply rooted anxiety of parents over the 35
ability of their children to master a minority language at home while also learning 36
a major world language can continue to be transmitted for generations even after 37
changes in the majority opinion have led to a more encouraging environment 38
for the minority language's speakers. Such attitudes are still evident in Ireland's 39
Gaeltacht, for example (Ó hÍfearnáin 2007, forthcoming), despite nearly a century 40

1 of state sponsored action in favor of Irish at home and school. In the context of
2 Spolsky's tripartite model of language policy (Spolsky 2004), it is the appropriate
3 management of these popular beliefs about language and the linguistic practices
4 linked to them which constitute effective language policy. Such deeply held be-
5 liefs about the value of language work at the subconscious level in minoritized
6 language communities and remain hidden from overt planning initiatives, yet
7 as Shohamy (2006) has emphasized, the way in which they are addressed is the
8 most powerful determiner of a policy's success or failure.

9 The most comprehensive studies on the numbers of Breton speakers, their
10 socio-economic profiles and language practices have been carried out by TMO-
11 Régions with financial support from the Regional Council and some of the depart-
12 ments (*départements*) in Brittany. The methodologies employed in the first survey
13 in 1997 (Broudic 1999, 2009) have been shown to be statistically robust in inde-
14 pendent large-scale surveying by the national statistics agency INSEE and the
15 census body INED in 1999 (Le Boëtté 2003). The most recent TMO Régions survey
16 was carried out between 3 and 19 December 2007, with 3,109 informants in all
17 five departments that make up the historic region of Brittany, interviewed by tel-
18 ephone. It concluded that 206,000 people could speak Breton either "very well"
19 or "quite well" (Broudic 2009). About 89% of the speakers live in western, Lower
20 Brittany (*Breizh Izel*), home to the traditional speaker community. The very mar-
21 ginal presence of Breton in schooling in the past means that nearly all speakers
22 over 40 years old acquired the language from their home or community. In west-
23 ern Brittany currently 46% over 75 can speak Breton, 25% in the 60–74 cohort,
24 10% in the 40–59 group, and 2% in the 20–39 age group. The numbers aged 15–19
25 who speak Breton (3% of the age cohort or 9,000 individuals) have, however,
26 increased in the last ten years despite 70% saying that neither of their parents
27 could speak the language, doubtless as a result of schooling. At the start of the
28 2011–2012 school year there were 14,174 pupils attending Breton medium schools
29 or classes (5,995 in state bilingual programs, 4,651 in Catholic Dihun classes and
30 3,528 in the *Diwan* association immersion schools). In addition to these, about
31 8,000 primary and 5,000 secondary school pupils attend Breton classes in the
32 mainstream schools (Broudic 2011; *Ofis Publik ar Brezhoneg* 2012).

33 This evidence sets the background and challenges for language policy initia-
34 tives. The overwhelming majority of Breton speakers speak a traditional variety.
35 Establishing an affective and linguistic continuity between new speakers and
36 their native-speaker elders has been identified as a priority in regional language
37 policy, but to what extent the newly benign sociolinguistic environment can bol-
38 ster this is moot. There is now, however, widespread support for pro-Breton poli-
39 cies, with speakers of the language most strongly in favor of policies to maintain
40 and promote it. Support for maintaining Breton was 89% in Lower Brittany, the

traditional homeland of the language, while policies to actually promote Breton 1
usage were backed by 76% of Breton speakers and 56% of non-speakers (Broudic 2
2009: 149–152). 3

This paper draws, in part, on data from a fieldwork project in Lower Brittany 4
and interviews with employees of *Ofis ar Brezhoneg* / Office de la Langue Bretonne. 5
The field work was undertaken in October 2009. 17 semi-structured interviews 6
were carried out individually and in small groups with informants whose pri- 7
mary professional work is with the Breton language. All those interviewed were 8
in the age group 29–45 and work as primary or secondary school teachers, as 9
language development agents, in the media or in music and entertainment. All 10
live in the historically Breton-speaking part of the Côtes d’Armor department, 11
encompassing the southern part of the Trégor region and the north-eastern part 12
of Cornouaille. This is one of the most strongly Breton speaking areas in the 13
country. Interviewees were specifically chosen for this paper because they had 14
been brought up speaking Breton themselves in an area where Breton was spoken 15
traditionally, or had learnt Breton from their immediate family and neighbors in 16
childhood. Breton speakers who have such a personal background and who work 17
professionally with the language offer valuable insights into the practice and po- 18
tential of language policy, as they are drawn from a group who were involved 19
in the promoting of Breton before the expansion of institutionalized language 20
promotion. Most of the informants make their living directly from state financed 21
activities or from agencies depending on public money, while the entertainment 22
and media professionals rely on the positive profile of the language and culture 23
in the public mind, as well as the many ways in which public funding is used to 24
support performances and artistic creation. Most of the informants themselves 25
described either themselves or their parents as language activists, a movement 26
which has historically positioned itself in opposition to the ideology and actions 27
of the state. All also had higher education in Breton, meaning that they were liter- 28
ate in Breton and were sensitized to the often-posed divide between traditional 29
Breton spoken in rural areas and that of the revival movement (Hornsby 2005). 30
This sample is also salient in that their professional profiles correspond to the 31
contemporary image Breton speakers enjoy in the public mind, promoted by the 32
media. Broudic (2009: 88) comments that many of these media-friendly people 33
are responsible for bilingual schools and evening classes, are publishers and 34
singers, are theatre performers, speak on the radio and appear on television and 35
in the newspapers. They also tend to be urban-based, although this is not the case 36
in our sample. They are what Spolsky (2004) has called real language planners or 37
managers in that their own practices and beliefs about language influence those 38
of a much wider population with whom they come into contact. Broudic (2009) 39
nevertheless cautions that the most common profile of the Breton speaker which 40

1 emerged from the 2007 research is most likely an elderly married woman with no
2 formal education, living in a small rural community.

3 This discussion is also informed by a wide ranging interview on language
4 policy initiatives conducted in October 2010 with Olier ar Mogn, the projects man-
5 ager based in *Ofis ar Brezhoneg*'s Rennes office, and by informal meetings on the
6 initiatives which were held with other employees of the agency. Informants in *Ofis*
7 *ar Brezhoneg* commented wryly on their role as poachers turned game-keepers
8 in the continuing "conversation" between language activists and the authori-
9 ties, but saw this as further evidence of the increasingly positive public image of
10 Breton among the population and political class, and of the responsibility now
11 being placed by the general public on the Breton language movement.

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14 2 Regional language policy

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16 Spolsky (2003) makes the case that policies aimed at societal language mainte-
17 nance and reversing language shift can be divided into two broad areas of action.
18 He proposes that "revitalization" is the appropriate term for actions which focus
19 on home language acquisition and usage, notably in educational policy, while
20 "regeneration" is the best term for those which affect wider society, such as of-
21 ficial status and the language's profile in the public space. The emphasis in the
22 Regional Council's 2004 policy document is mainly on education within school
23 and increasing provision and access to Breton language learning, and so may
24 be considered to concentrate on the revitalization side. The two types of policy
25 are nevertheless inter-dependent and rely on each other's success. A core issue
26 identified by all informants in the field work that informs this paper is how
27 links can be made between Breton learners at school and in adult classes, the
28 residual traditional speakers and wider societal usage in domains from which
29 Breton has been absent, or excluded, in the modern period. The role of normal-
30 izing, or removing any controversy or ambiguity about the use of spoken Breton
31 outside the home environment and giving it a meaningful visibility in the public
32 space through such areas as signage, official documentation, print and broadcast
33 media presence were seen by all informants as contributing to this goal by reduc-
34 ing traditional speakers' hesitancy to use the language with those they do not
35 know while also giving new speakers confidence in their efforts.

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2.1 *Ofis ar Brezhoneg* and the genesis of regional language policy

Ofis ar Brezhoneg, the Breton language agency, was established by the Regional Council with the support of the French Ministry of Culture in 1999 to devise and implement development strategies for Breton in all areas of public and social life. In practice this has meant offering advice and organizing language development and planning initiatives mainly for local government and public services in the first instance. It was originally a not-for-profit organization staffed largely by Breton activists. In September 2010 it was re-established by the State, the Breton and Pays de la Loire regional councils and the five Breton department councils as a public service institution, *Ofis Publik ar Brezhoneg* / Office Publique de la Langue Bretonne and its staff have in that sense become employees of the state. It played a critical role in creating the Breton Regional Council's language policy by informing the political debate through its own research and actions and in providing focus points for language initiatives. Since it became a publicly owned institution, its relationship with the Regional Council, including both its politicians and civil servants, is much closer and it functions to some extent as a the driver of policy initiatives as well as in their implementation. The origins of the 2004 Regional Council policy can be found in a series of studies and documents produced by *Ofis ar Brezhoneg* under the presidency of Lena Louarn, who on election to the Regional Council in 2010 became its vice-president with responsibility for the languages of Brittany. In particular, *Brezhoneg 2015*, its development plan with a view to 2015 (*Ofis ar Brezhoneg* 2004a) contains the core goals later adopted by the region. That proposal was in turn informed by an earlier study on the status of Breton in Brittany (*Observatoire de l'Office de la Langue Bretonne* 2002), and is complemented by a preliminary commentary on the Regional Council's 2004 policy (*Ofis ar Brezhoneg* 2004b) and a second report from its *Observatoire de la Langue Bretonne* (2007) which spans the period immediately before and after the implementation of the Regional Council's policy.

Brezhoneg 2015 called for the enactment of a Breton language policy, which it defined as a public policy in favor of the language (*Ofis ar Brezhoneg* 2004a: 3). It noted that various actions and schemes aimed at revitalizing Breton were being undertaken by the state, the region, the departments and other local government units but that there was not enough coherence among them nor a distribution of tasks among the different levels of administration that would enhance the positive effect of the collective effort. The desire for a centrally coordinated plan was justified by referencing the fact that language planning has been well established and its benefits tangible in many other jurisdictions. The appeal to perceived doubters through citing examples of best practice abroad is a common thread in

1 Breton public policy documents in this period of language policy creation. The
 2 proposal was put together and debated at public meetings from early 2003 to
 3 2004 and finally presented three goals and 52 actions to bring them about. The
 4 goals were:

- 5 1. To stabilize the number of Breton speakers by 2015.
- 6 2. Open up new areas of usage for Breton.
- 7 3. Improve the quality of Breton being used.

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 9 The first goal focused on education, seeking to have 25,000 children in the three
 10 bilingual school systems by 2015. Breton medium education is currently avail-
 11 able to Breton children in three forms of schooling: (a) bilingual classes in public
 12 schools (supported by the *Div Yezh* association), (b) bilingual classes in private
 13 Catholic schools (*Dihun*) and (c) the independent immersion schools (run by the
 14 *Diwan* association). The varying status of these different bilingual programs in
 15 the eyes of the French state has often been very fractious (Oakes 2011). The ratio-
 16 nale of concentrating on immersion and bilingual schooling was that if 10,000
 17 to 15,000 elderly Breton speakers continue to be lost each year, then these could
 18 be counterbalanced by the creation of new speakers through education, even if
 19 all those who attend those schools would not reach full fluency. How successful
 20 the school system is in producing new speakers is uncertain, and whether or not
 21 that is a central part of the ethos of all three systems is not clear either. There is
 22 a difference between children acquiring competence in the language and those
 23 same children necessarily becoming active speakers outside the classroom as a
 24 result of that linguistic competence. Broudic (2010b: 34–38) cites examples from
 25 Breton-medium schools that show that French dominates outside the classroom
 26 and in the peer group, and that teachers have to go to lengths to insist on Breton
 27 being spoken. Yet, there is ample evidence that many pupils do continue to speak
 28 Breton after leaving school. One of the informants in the autumn 2009 fieldwork
 29 who had attended *Diwan* schools from nursery through to high school said that
 30 nearly all her classmates, now in their early 30s, continued to speak Breton
 31 among themselves and speak it to their children, although she qualified this by
 32 saying that some of them spoke Breton with a limited vocabulary and idiom, and
 33 had not continued to improve their repertoire or integrate with more traditional
 34 speakers since leaving school.

35 The second goal focused on the expansion of the public use of Breton beyond
 36 education and particularly in its visibility in the public space. It emphasizes the
 37 promotion of the *Ya d'ar Brezhoneg* program (discussed in more detail below) in
 38 Brittany's municipalities (both rural and urban *communes* in the French local
 39 government system). It also contains actions on the wider use of Breton in the
 40 media, the need for more research on place names so that municipalities could

use the correct form on their local signage, for bilingual signage on roads which are the responsibility of national authorities and for more open and generalized societal usage.

The third goal aimed to build a positive relationship between traditional and new speakers, and is fundamentally linked to the first goal in that language promotion in the home and persuading parents to bring up their children in Breton should also be linked to the Breton language spoken by older generations in the locations where they live and by easier access to resources in traditional Breton through collection, publishing and online resources. Preservation of the oral and written linguistic heritage was also seen as fundamental.

2.2 The first steps in regional language policy

The 2004 policy document follows *Ofis ar Brezhoneg*'s lead in using cautious language in its opening statements and by justifying its action by reference to language policy developments outside Brittany, couching its proposals in a manner that seeks to counter any worries that the general public, or indeed Paris, might have that developing Breton would be to the detriment of French. It embeds the promotion of Breton and Gallo in the context of bilingualism with a view towards multilingualism and justifies its objectives by referring to international practice in support of cultural diversity and protection of linguistic minorities, citing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the Council of Europe's Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. It also sets the French political context by mentioning the then current (2004) debate on French constitutional reform, which led eventually in 2008 to the insertion of Article 75-1 of the French Constitution recognizing the "regional languages" as part of France's heritage. This apprehensiveness was necessary, in the views of the fieldwork informants. One of the informants in particular and one of the interviewed employees of *Ofis ar Brezhoneg* both expressed the view that language policy is a very new concept in public life in Brittany and that a lot of the population, let alone the civil service and political establishment, need to come to terms with its arrival. They also felt that policy drafters had to be very vigilant and not give any possible opponents of language promotion the opportunity to brand the proposals as emanating solely from the opinions of militant Breton nationalists and unconditional supporters of the language revival movement. Indeed, the authors of *Brezhoneg 2015* (*Ofis ar Brezhoneg* 2004a:14–15) recognized that language policy should be informed by sociolinguistic studies but that very little research of that nature was being undertaken in Breton universities, and called for it to become a language policy

1 objective in itself (Goal 1, Action 18). This is not unique to Brittany, of course.
2 Breton languages enthusiasts and activists often point to Welsh, a linguistically
3 related language with which many feel a degree of solidarity, as an example of
4 what could be achieved in Brittany, yet as Coupland and Aldridge (2009: 6) say,
5 while “the tide is flowing in favor of Welsh ethnolinguistic vitality at present, it
6 is also true that language policy makers (including Bwrdd Yr Iaith) and social
7 analysts are operating on the basis of inadequate sociolinguistic and socio-
8 psychological data.”

9 The declared policy tries to distance itself from the Breton language move-
10 ment by stating that policy must encourage rather than oblige the learning of
11 Breton and that the language belongs to ‘the whole Breton population not just
12 to a handful of enthusiasts, whatever their merits may be’ (*Conseil Régional de*
13 *Bretagne* 2004). While accepting the necessity to make such a statement for po-
14 litical reasons, some of the fieldwork informants found this statement of public
15 ownership and institutionalization mildly offensive, pointing out that everything
16 that had been accomplished for Breton from an educational and status perspec-
17 tive prior to the Regional Council’s intervention had been achieved by such en-
18 thusiasts as individuals or in groups and associations, and that while they never
19 said that the language did not belong to all Bretons, it did not belong to the Re-
20 gional Council either.

21 The region’s policy actions are, however, limited by its powers of implemen-
22 tation. The Regional Council has consistently called for the transfer of powers for
23 bilingual education planning to the region, reaffirmed by a unanimous vote of the
24 Council in January 2009, but reaching an agreement on structured development
25 of the sector with the French education authorities has been laborious. This coor-
26 dination is important for bilingual schooling plans because of the three separate
27 bilingual school systems. *Diwan* is an independent association and opens schools
28 where there is parental demand, but is restricted by the availability of space and
29 teachers, which in turn depend on subsidies from the Region and central educa-
30 tional funding for the teachers’ salaries. The private, Catholic *Dihun* schools are
31 also semi-detached from the state system while the bilingual classes supported
32 by *Div Yezh* exist within schools which are directly under the responsibility of the
33 Ministry of Education and its local representative, the *Rectorat*. Despite efforts at
34 coordinating the provision of schooling among the three systems, especially since
35 2006, with the aim of having one school serving every 20km radius, relations be-
36 tween the *Rectorat*, the Region and parents and teachers who favor the opening
37 of new bilingual classes in schools have often been strained, as our informants
38 confirmed. They pointed out that two or even three of the models often exist at
39 primary level in the same areas (c.f. map of Breton medium and bilingual primary
40 school provision in 2011, *Ofis ar Brezhoneg* 2011), and gave many anecdotal ex-

amples of competition between the state authorities and the *Diwan* association 1
 in particular, expressing the opinion that the *Rectorat* can tend to ignore local 2
 demand for a bilingual class until *Diwan* or *Dihun* decide to establish a school 3
 in that locality, at which time the *Rectorat* will move to open a bilingual class in 4
 order to undermine them, while demand for bilingual schooling goes unanswered 5
 in other areas. An alternative interpretation would be that all three systems are 6
 responding to local demand rather than being involved in more farsighted plan- 7
 ning, which the regional language policy would try to address. Precedent does 8
 exist for such practical arrangements in other French regions, for example the 9
 agreement between the local representatives of the Ministry of Education and the 10
 Languedoc-Roussillon region on the teaching of Catalan and Occitan which came 11
 into effect in December 2009. The 2010 statutes of *Ofis ar Brezhoneg* give places 12
 on its governing council to representatives of the *Rectorat*, and our interviewees 13
 expressed the hope that the coordination of spatial planning of immersion and 14
 bilingual schooling would become a priority so that parents in all parts of Brit- 15
 tany would have that option. 16

In its 2004 policy aims, Brittany's regional council had to content itself 17
 with "seeking the greatest cooperation among its partners, and especially the 18
 five Breton *départements*, to perpetuate Breton language and culture" (*Conseil* 19
Régional de Bretagne 2004). To achieve this, it divided its action into three main 20
 areas: 21

1. Passing on the language (concentrating on schooling, family usage, adult 22
 learners and publicity campaigns). 23
2. Developing language usage in social and public life (with emphasis on the 24
 media and language plans at local level). 25
3. Encouraging cultural production (especially in publishing, theatre and 26
 song). 27

These are broadly the same as those suggested in *Ofis ar Brezhoneg*'s earlier 29
Brezhoneg 2015, the "quality of Breton being spoken" and "stabilizing the 30
 numbers of speakers" having been amalgamated under the first of the Regional 31
 Council's priorities, while it chose to put more emphasis on the public presence 32
 of Breton by presenting it as two separate priorities. These are also areas in which 33
 the Regional Council had had an established funding role. Some of the implica- 34
 tions and reactions to the policy priorities in education and the quality of Breton 35
 are discussed, drawing on the October 2009 fieldwork in Ó hÍfearnáin (2011). This 36
 article will look more closely at the support given by the Regional Council and 37
 by *Ofis ar Brezhoneg* to developing the visibility of Breton in the public space, 38
 particularly through the *Ya d'ar Brezhoneg* initiative. 39

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3 Language regeneration policy: *Ya d'ar Brezhoneg*

Ya d'ar Brezhoneg ('Yes to Breton') is a program aimed at the whole of civil society, including local government, private enterprise, voluntary associations and individuals in the public eye, such as artists and musicians. Those who designed and now implement it believe that such a language regeneration policy, to use Spolsky's (2003) term, that gives visibility to Breton in the public arena, encourages overt use by institutions, associations and even by individuals who command the public's respect, can affect home and community use and lead to more language revitalization. Launched by *Ofis ar Brezhoneg* in October 2001, it was inspired, as Olier ar Mogn freely recognizes, by the success of *Bai Euskararai* ('Yes to Basque'), a similar operation which had been established by a large group of Basque cultural associations from both sides of the French-Spanish border in the late 1990s. *Bai Euskararai*, like *Ya d'ar Brezhoneg* after it, has taken on an increasingly central role in some aspects of community language planning in the Basque country and has become more institutionally anchored.

Ya d'ar Brezhoneg can be compared to the language schemes that have become a feature of local language legislation in many countries where the authorities aim to regenerate and revitalize a minoritized language, such as recent developments in Ireland and Scotland, for example (Walsh and McLeod 2008), but with some important differences in the nature of its founding ideology and implementation. The Irish language schemes are legally required of all public companies named in the Official Languages Act (2003). These include all bodies which belong directly to the state or which are financed through public money. The principle is one of customer service whereby Irish speakers should be able to make contact with, and expect services from all state institutions and companies, albeit within defined limits. Language schemes are agreed between the public companies and the office of *an Coimisinéir Teanga*, a language commissioner appointed by the President, whose role owes much to the Canadian model. The role of the office of the *Coimisinéir* is then to monitor the implementation of the agreed schemes and to follow up on any complaints made by members of the public with regard to the working of the schemes and to their language rights more generally. Although this kind of language regeneration project can be seen as cooperative and locally grounded, it draws on the compulsion inherent in the status of Irish as an official language of the state and on the consequent rights of citizens to use it with branches of the state. It has an unmistakable element of top-down planning, an essentially conservative form of language planning which Baldauf (2006: 148–149) describes as "future-oriented systematic-change of language code, use and/

or speaking, most visibly taken by government”. There are a number of practical and ideological problems associated with such an approach. Two of the main issues are the inability of many of the state bodies to provide the appropriate level of services due to a lack of personnel with the essential linguistic competence in the necessary areas, and also the lack of a program of “active offer”. Despite its official status since the 1920s, the definition of the *Gaeltacht* and linguistic intervention in it, and the enormous state investment in Irish as both compulsory subject and facultative medium of education, Irish speakers have remained a minoritized group and on the whole do not expect to be able to get services and deal with officialdom in their own language. For language schemes based on customer service to be successful, customers themselves have to be sensitized to the availability of such services and they must be delivered in an unmarked, natural way that does not require the bilingual user to seek out Irish versions of forms or to make extra efforts to do their business in Irish. Despite the robust structure and statutory obligations, the implementation of languages schemes under the Official Languages Act (2003) has not been wholly successful (Walsh 2011, 2012). Many schemes adopted early in the process have not been renewed and the pace of creating new schemes has slowed, no new scheme being adopted in 2011. Many state companies are thus now without a valid scheme, or never produced one. The Official Languages Act (2003), the role of the *Coimisinéir Teanga*, the functions of the government department responsible for the *Gaeltacht*, the areas of action of *Údaráis na Gaeltachta* (the *Gaeltacht* development agency), as well as funding for the Irish voluntary sector are all under official review at the time of writing.

In contrast to the model adopted in Ireland and to a degree also in Scotland, *Ya d'ar Brezhoneg* is a voluntarist scheme in keeping with the non-obligatory ethos espoused by the Regional Council. It seeks to help bodies come up with language plans that are in keeping with their own ambitions and ability to deliver. With such an ideological and practical basis, the program can be extended to the private and voluntary sectors. The current popularity of measures to support Breton in Brittany is in keeping with the contemporary trend in favor of minority language protection in much of Europe, among speakers of those languages and non-speakers alike, observed by Coupland and Aldridge (2009) and Moriarty (2010) among others. As one of our informants said of the program, whereas twenty years ago the municipalities were cleaning off Breton that had been daubed over their signs, they are now putting Breton on everything that can be labeled, and nearly everybody is happy about it – according to this same informant, Breton is becoming *une langue tendance* ‘a trendy, fashionable language’.

The program works as a contract between *Ofis ar Brezhoneg* and the body establishing the plan. In its first phase this was a simple written agreement to use

1 more Breton in the public space within certain defined areas and was aimed pri-
2 marily at non-governmental organizations. The second phase, which launched
3 on 22 December 2004, was much more developed and aimed more specifically
4 at local government, particularly the *communes*, those urban and rural munici-
5 pal administrative units with their elected members, officers and employees that
6 cover the whole country, and also aimed at the newer groupings of rural and
7 urban municipalities. In *Ya d'ar Brezhoneg 2* the agreement takes the form of a
8 charter whereby those designing their language plan are offered a catalogue of
9 some 40 possible actions that they can undertake to promote the use of Breton
10 in the public space. They range from basic actions in the first sections, such as
11 the mounting of bilingual place name signs at the entry and exit of the village or
12 town, using bilingual note paper or making a Breton version of the town hall's
13 website to more complex actions such as the erection of Breton or bilingual signs
14 for all streets or rural hamlets, writing Breton editorials in local newssheets, par-
15 ticipating in the promotion of language classes for adults or even going as far as
16 making bilingual versions of official forms available, including birth, death and
17 marriage certificates. Several Breton activists interviewed had feared that the in-
18 clusion of Breton on official legal documents such as marriage or birth certificates
19 and on voting ballots might cause adverse reaction from the Prefecture, or Minis-
20 try of the Interior. It is a sign of the changed view of France's regional languages
21 in circles of central government and authority that the Prefects in Brittany, and in
22 other French regions, have chosen to interpret laws that say documentation must
23 be in French by saying that this does not mean it cannot be provided in other
24 languages as well.

25 *Ofis ar Brezhoneg* offers advice on all aspects of these action plans, including
26 place-name research and also translation services, for a fee. Once the local coun-
27 cil or body making the plan has followed through with it, the situation is verified
28 by *Ofis ar Brezhoneg* according to freely available criteria, such as whether the
29 Breton and French are equally visible with complete translation and whether the
30 public can see and have access to the Breton versions. In response to the imple-
31 mentation of the plan *Ofis ar Brezhoneg* then gives a "label", a kind of quality
32 assurance for language promotion, which can be awarded at three levels accord-
33 ing to whether 5, 10 or 15 of the 40 proposed actions are in operation. A number
34 of the fieldwork informants said that this approach has had a number of very
35 positive effects in that some municipalities see themselves as in competition with
36 their neighbors to achieve a higher grade of label. Olier ar Mogn also believes
37 that the enthusiasm in many communities for the *Ya d'ar Brezhoneg* label shows
38 that language regeneration projects of this nature have taken root in the popular
39 consciousness because actions at municipal level, even in small rural communes,
40 must be voted upon by the local council and although they may not be costly, and

indeed *Ofis ar Brezhoneg* is keen to highlight those which are cost neutral, imple- 1
mentation does require a group effort and support. One of our fieldwork infor- 2
mants did point out one of the weaknesses in the system is that as it is voluntary 3
and so much work in Breton still relies on one or two enthusiastic individuals 4
in each local area because the number of productive literate Breton speakers is 5
still quite small, should circumstances change and these people be unavailable, 6
despite group enthusiasm for the project, it might be hard to implement. It is in 7
the provision of structures that enable language promotion to be implemented 8
that *Ofis ar Brezhoneg* informants see the response to this issue. They believe that 9
in the near future, popular endorsement of such actions will be backed by in- 10
stitutional structures so that the plans do not rely on the unflinching resolve of 11
one or two individuals. For the moment, Breton language movement workers and 12
enthusiasts still appear to play a central role in each local area. 13

As the *Ya d'ar Brezhoneg* program evolves, more and more local authori- 14
ties, companies, associations and individuals have signed up to agreements and 15
charters with *Ofis ar Brezhoneg*. By September 2011 some 688 businesses, shops, 16
unions, political parties, professional associations, voluntary organizations, 17
medical practitioners, camping sites, leisure centers and museums, education 18
providers from nursery to university, as well as festivals, performing artists, thea- 19
tres, broadcast and print media had signed a *Ya d'ar Brezhoneg* agreement. In 20
addition to these, 147 municipalities and 8 groupings of municipalities had also 21
signed a *Ya d'ar Brezhoneg* charter and been awarded a label. The scale of the 22
program's success is now becoming a problem for its monitoring and further de- 23
velopment as *Ofis ar Brezhoneg* only has approximately 25 employees in their of- 24
fices in Rennes, Nantes, Carhaix-Plouguer and Cavan, most of whom are devoted 25
to tasks other than developing *Ya d'ar Brezhoneg*. All of the informants and *Ofis* 26
employees were certain that a new method of working will be needed to keep 27
the dynamic, but also saw greater institutionalization as one of the possible out- 28
comes whereby provisions such as those in the charter become the norm. 29

4 Breton in Upper Brittany 30 31 32 33

One of the challenges for the language policy pursued by the Regional Council 34
and *Ofis ar Brezhoneg* is to what extent it can be seen as relevant to parts of Brit- 35
tany where there is no residual community of traditional speakers and where 36
Breton may never have been the language of the majority of the community. In 37
these places it can be legitimately asked as to whether the paradigms of revitali- 38
zation and regeneration are appropriate, or whether the language project should 39
be understood in a different light. 40

1 Brittany is typically described in the sociolinguistic literature as being di-
2 vided between historically Breton speaking Lower Brittany in the west and Upper
3 Brittany in the east, home to Gallo, a *langue d'hui*, linguistically close to standard
4 French. It is difficult to say to what extent Breton was ever the main language east
5 of the line described by Sébillot (1886) (see Figure 1), but Loth (1883), based on
6 place-name evidence from the ninth century, considered that at its widest expan-
7 sion Breton was spoken by communities close to the Norman border in the north,
8 southwards to near Saint Nazaire, west of Nantes. Sébillot's line seems to reflect
9 quite accurately where Breton still has traditional speakers. Despite rapid decline
10 over most of western Brittany, Timm (1983) found that native Breton was spoken
11 in three quarters of the areas on the line in 1976. The major exception was that if a
12 linguistic frontier is not actually illusory, the city of Vannes should by then have
13 been considered to be outside the traditional Breton heartland. Timm (2009: 716)
14 suggests that her (1976) interpretation of Breton surviving in islands in an ever-
15 widening sea of French speakers still holds, but should better be conceptualized



40 **Fig. 1:** Brittany, showing the approximate positions of the Sébillot and Loth lines

less geographically, as social networks or communities of practice. Although the geographic linguistic boundaries have thus been relatively stable for generations, they have always been porous. Olier ar Mogn relates that during fieldwork along the hypothetical linguistic border to determine correct spellings of place names for municipalities that were intending to erect bilingual signage for their *Ya d'ar Brezhoneg* charter, local native Breton speakers were found in several areas east of Sébillot's 19th century line. Although the social networks and communities of practice remain denser in the traditionally Breton speaking rural west, the nature of urbanization and modern living conditions mean that members of these social networks also live in the east, where there is an established presence of communities of Breton practice.

The Regional Council's (2004) language policy also aims to support and develop Gallo, but Le Coadic (1998), for example, found that Breton was a more obvious identity marker and target language for learners on both sides of the posited linguistic border. Further east, Ar Mogn (2000) says that Breton is not just a heritage issue for children of migrants from Lower Brittany, and points to Breton's tangible urban presence in Upper Brittany, the result of a collective cultural re-appropriation of the language that is similar, in his view, to that experienced in contemporary western Brittany's towns and countryside. Promoting Breton is thus a population's investment in a cultural capital that they feel they share with all other Bretons by virtue of being Breton by birth, residence or choice and should not be understood as a case of promoting an ancestral language alone. He points to Breton speaking families in Upper Brittany and to bilingual schools, thousands of adult learners, a media presence, large numbers of students of Breton in the universities and to language associations that have their headquarters in the regional capital. Revitalization, regeneration and re-appropriation of Breton rather than Gallo appear as clearer, more tangible targets to the majority of the population and to policy makers.

5 Conclusion

Brittany's Regional Council is in the process of formulating a new and more detailed language policy that will set to build on the foundations laid in the first ten years of this century. However, the capacity to implement the policy is a hindrance. The ambitious targets for the opening of bilingual classes and schools and the enrolments of pupils have not been met, although numbers are increasing. It has proved difficult to recruit sufficient new teachers to meet the demand (Broudic 2010b) and even the relatively modest number of posts allocated for teacher training and deployment has been under-subscribed. The success of *Ya*

d'ar Brezhoneg has also highlighted that a relatively small number of professionals are being charged with enormous responsibility for language promotion. Capacity building in the language-related professions is already a major challenge, while the ever present reality of the decline in the numbers of traditional speakers and their communities continues. The fieldwork informants all expressed some anxiety that while Breton was currently fashionable in many circles, a failure of Breton language professionals to meet the general public's expectations could lead to a slide in support over time. They all expressed the belief, however, that Brittany has a core group of language activists that have now kept the language issue to the fore for several generations and that this would not change, no matter what the future of official language policy might bring, clearly articulating a belief that the language activist community and the institutionalization process have not merged to become one body. Nevertheless, the first phases of the institutionalization of the Breton revitalization and regeneration movement were driven by the enthusiasts, and its current chief agents are drawn from their number. They have skillfully navigated the opportunities that this contemporary liberal western society has afforded them and have laid the foundations for language policies that both are dynamic and have retained the support of the majority of the population. How far language policy can develop further without significant capacity building in the language professions and without significant success in drawing traditional and new speakers together are the main challenges that activists, policy makers and researchers have identified.

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